

Oxen Lane

Five acres or

Oxen Lane, North Curry

16 families Somerset

Moved in Oct '04

Taunton Deans Council apply
for injunction to evict

c 9 Feb 05

owners Appealing against refusal of
planning permission

Maggie Smith?

I'm sorry, says farmer in gypsy camp sale

By Valerie Elliott and Laura Peek

A SOMERSET farmer and his wife have been besieged by villagers after a plot of land they sold at auction was turned into a gypsy encampment.

Brian Jeanes, and his wife, Kathryn, both 53, said last night that they have been inundated with phone calls from neighbours, some in tears, chastising them for selling the land to unsuitable buyers, and others offering them support.

They learnt the truth on Saturday when they discovered

the field that they had sold for £34,000 in April had been transformed into a caravan site.

The Jeanes, from North Curry, near Taunton, feel let down and deceived by the purchasers, who they described as "a respectable couple", and last night told other landowners to sell land by private tender rather than public auction.

Tyre tracks were carved out yesterday in the field, now a makeshift parking bay for 18 caravans with satellite dishes.

Mr Jeanes said: "I feel a real surging in my stomach. If I had my time again, I can honestly

LEWIS WHYLD / SWNS



Lie of the land: Kathryn Jeanes from North Curry, Somerset, looks at the field she sold that is now being developed by travellers

say I would not have sold by auction. You have no control."

Mrs Jeanes said: "I feel gutted. It is horrendous. The person who feels most affected, Julia Tibbs, rang us and just

said to us: "Thank you!" She wasn't nasty. But what could we have done?"

She said that the village had always welcomed travellers and gypsy children had always had places at the local school.

Despite the uproar, Mrs Jeanes was also adamant that the newcomers should not be ostracised: "We have to keep an open mind. We can't judge people just yet. But locals are saying the place is never going to be the same again."

The ordeal for the Jeanes and their neighbours started just before Easter when the couple put up for sale a field that they had lovingly restored as "a beautiful paddock".

Some locals were jittery about the sale and feared this might be an ideal spot for traveller families. On the night of the auction at the Nag's Head pub outside Taunton, a large crowd turned up. After a flurry of interest in the field the hammer went down on £34,000.

Diana Tapsall, from St Austell, Cornwall, then paid the £3,400 deposit and agreed to pay the remainder within the usual four weeks.

The Jeanes left straightaway



for a family gathering, but other neighbours to the land spotted Ms Tapsall talking to a group of gypsies. The following day Mr Jeanes was alerted, and fearing travellers were about to set up camp, blocked up the gates with concrete slabs.

The locals then pleaded with him to renege on the contract and promised to pay him the auction price plus any legal fees. The Jeaneses took advice from the National Farmers' Union and two other solicitors, and were advised that if they broke the contract they could be sued for a sum much larger than £34,000.

Mr Jeanes said: "In the end I decided to go ahead, it was my decision. Probably with hind-

sight I should not have done it. But I had also been warned to think of my own safety."

Householders were convinced an encampment was planned and alerted Taunton Deane council, which promised to issue an immediate "stop notice order" on anyone moving on to the land. When they discovered the mayhem on the field at 5pm, there was only one person on duty at the council.

Mr Jeanes said: "Julia told us about the travellers on Saturday. She'd clearly had a sleepless night. She was not abusive, but was very tense, understandably, and I sympathise enormously. But the council was at fault. They were tardy and inadequate. Most people are being sympathetic, but I feel hard done by that I was deceived."

He seemed a little shocked by the reaction too from some of the locals, and said: "If they were my neighbours I'd go and say hello."

Julia Hibbs, however, is furious: "We begged him to back out of the sale... I hope he rots in hell, really, and I am not that sort of person usually. The view out of my back garden today is of a septic tank and a digger."